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SUBJECT: CZECHS SHARE USG PERSPECTIVE ON CASTRO'S
RESIGNATION

REF: STATE 18317

¶1. (SBU) Czech MFA officials in the Department of the Americas and the Department of Human Rights and Transition Policy, confirmed and thanked Embassy officials for our points on the current situation in Cuba. On February 19, the Czech MFA released a statement (similar to Secretary Rice's subsequent statement of February 24), expressing the hope that Cuba will now begin to implement necessary reforms, while also urging Cuba to release all political prisoners, open dialogue with the opposition and hold a free election. The Czech MFA has no plans at this point to release another statement. The full statement dated February 19 is listed below in paragraph 2.

¶2. (U) Statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic on the resignation of Fidel Castro from the highest state positions
The Cuban media announced today that Cuban leader Fidel Castro has resigned the position of the Chairman of the National Council and the Supreme Commander of the Cuban Armed Forces. Since July 2006, these positions had been temporarily held by his brother Raul Castro due to Fidel Castro's deteriorated health condition. According to accessible information, Raul Castro will lead the country even after Fidel Castro's resignation. This development has been expected because Fidel Castro has indicated his plan before.

Although it is just a formal confirmation of the status quo, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic expresses the hope that Cuba will thus set on a path of necessary reforms of the political and economic system that would lead this beautiful country out of the stagnation of the past long years. The future development should be aimed at releasing all political prisoners, opening a dialogue with the political opposition, and holding a free election.
Dodman